

Kenai-Russian River Collaborative Public Process

April 2011



**Seeking your assistance in developing
effective management actions for
reducing human-bear conflicts**



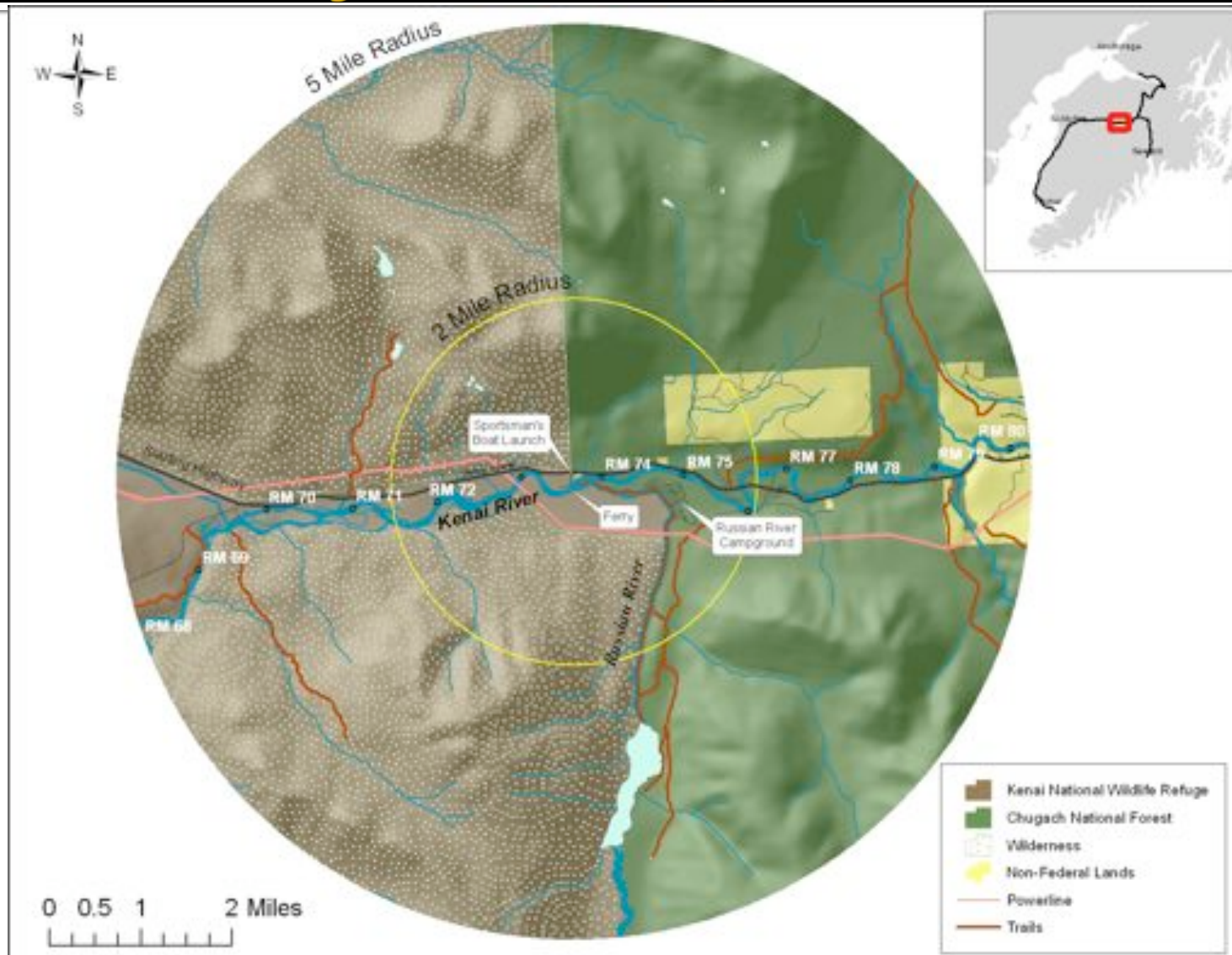
The Kenai-Russian River Complex (KRRC) is an intensively used recreation area, valued by anglers and other visitors for easy access to the popular roadside sockeye salmon fishery and recreation site. The site is also one of the most significant cultural sites in Alaska.



Conflicts between humans and bears have occurred in the past at the KRRC – and the potential for future conflicts raises management challenges.

Kenai-Russian River Complex (KRRC)

Focus of management attention – 5 Mile Radius from Confluence



Management Agencies Sponsoring the Collaborative Public Process



USDA Forest Service, Chugach National Forest – manages land for multiple use, campground, day use parking, trails and cabins, angler access



US Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge – manages land (most designated Wilderness), ferry and angler access site

In collaboration with:



Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Divisions of Wildlife Conservation and Sport Fish – manage for sustainable sport fisheries and wildlife populations

... and other members of the Russian River Interagency Coordination Group



Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation – oversees management of Kenai River Special Management Area, which includes portion of the area



Kenaitze Indian Tribe – longstanding history and heritage in the area; operates cultural heritage site

Cook Inlet Region, Inc. – regional Alaska native corporation; owns land in the area

Purpose and Need for Collaborative Process

- Our focus is on minimizing human-bear conflicts and related public/employee safety concerns, while providing recreation opportunities and appropriately managing fish and wildlife resources.



Collaborative Public Process

- Public invited to help identify effective and appropriate management actions & strategies to reduce human-bear conflicts in the Kenai-Russian River high use area.
- Agencies consider ideas suggested by public, and evaluate them in light of management experience, practicality of implementation, and their respective missions and statutory authorities.
- Intend to meet again with public in October 2011, to further discuss and get feedback on effective and appropriate management actions.

Bears & Humans – Too Close for Comfort



Bears that might otherwise pass through the area in July may linger, due to concentrated availability of food – fish, waste from harvested fish, human foods & garbage.

Food Conditioning – Bears associate particular behavior with a reward

Habituation to Humans – Bears tolerate people at close distances

Learned behavior – Adults teach young



Elements that define a human-bear conflict

- Bear exhibits a stress-related or curious behavior, causing a person to take extreme evasive action.
- Bear makes physical contact with a person or exhibited clear predatory behavior.
- Bear intentionally harmed or killed (not including legal harvests) by a person.

There have been human-bear conflicts – and there is potential for future conflicts

- 2003- Serious mauling of an angler
- 2006- Camper injured in tent in Russian River Campground
- Bears have been killed in Defense of Life/Property (DLP) and in management actions to protect public safety

Brown bears killed in the Russian River vicinity* (1980-2010)

Source: ADFG, Thomas McDonough, 2010



* Approx. mile 53-56 Sterling Highway, including confluence

Increasing Management Coordination, Presence, and Capacity for Public Contact

- Russian River Interagency Coordination Group convened in 2007 – coordinate management at KRRC
- Streamwatch volunteers – grew from 16-65 from 1994-2010; on both USFS and USFWS lands
- Additional law enforcement
- USFS and USFWS staff trained as Forest Protection Officers
- Three interagency technicians patrol the area daily
- Alaska Recreation Management - Safety staff patrol campgrounds

Management Actions / Strategies

2003-2010 (see handout)

- Education about reducing bear attractants and fish waste management
 - One-on-one public contacts (agency staff, Streamwatch)
 - Public education tools (flyers, signs, AM radio)
- Enforcement / Regulations
 - Food storage regulations (within 3')
 - Retained fish regulations (within 12')
 - Increased enforcement staff
 - Temporary actions taken to address specific conflicts (e.g. night-time closures to river access in limited areas in some seasons)
- Engineering / Infrastructure
 - Bear resistant containers at campgrounds
- Bear hazing and removal when necessary
- Agencies tracking the number and level of human-bear interactions

Fish Waste Management Strategies (see handout)

- 2006-2010 – “Stop, Chop & Throw” encouraged
- 2007/2008 – Fish waste chopper and grinder prototypes tested (not effective)
- 2009/10 – Anglers encouraged to:
 - 1) take fish out whole
 - 2) gut/gill only; or
 - 3) chop fish waste into numerous small pieces and throw into fast moving currents at confluence or ferry
- 2009/10 – Reduced number of fishing cleaning tables; only at confluence and ferry sites
- Manual removal of fish waste from eddies (2005, 2006, 2009)

Your Ideas are Very Welcome

We are very interested in your ideas about how past management actions have worked and how we can improve upon them

Small Group Discussions

1. What are specific issues related to human-bear interactions that you believe should be addressed? (~ 30 minutes)
2. What management actions & strategies should be used to address these issues? (~ 45 minutes)
3. Identify top 3-4 responses to each question to share with large group (~ 5 minutes)

Categories of Actions You Might Consider

- Fish waste management
- Spatial and temporal management of people
- Bear resistant infrastructure
- Adverse conditioning of bears
- Public outreach & education – on-site, in-season and longer-term (what works best ... radio, signs, one-on-one?)
- Citizen stewardship efforts
- Voluntary public efforts
- Regulations / Enforcement
- Other ideas welcome!

Next Steps & More Information

- Agencies will consider input from these collaborative public forums and bring more specific alternatives / scenarios to back to the public in October 2011.
- **Please stay involved:**
 - Email comments to: comments-alaska-chugach-seward@fs.fed.us -- put "Kenai-Russian River comment" in subject line.
 - Go to: <https://projects.ecr.gov/kenai-russianriver/>
 - Contact Jan Caulfield, janc@gci.net
907-523-4610 (in Juneau)